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FEATURED

Sex offender acquitted of non-register

Mary Madewell
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A six-man, six-woman jury on Thursday acquitted a Lamar County parolee whose attorney said he forgot to register as a sex offender.

The jury found Joe Winton, 55 of Powderly, not guilty of failing to register as a sex offender after hearing testimony for a day and a half before 62nd District Judge Will Biard.

Winton was convicted of aggravated sexual assault in September 1985 and pleaded guilty a month later to a second aggravated sexual assault charge, for which he received 10 years to run concurrently with his life sentence. He served 29 years of the sentence before being released on parole.

“Obviously, we are disappointed with the verdict,” said Jill Drake, prosecutor with the Lamar County district attorney’s office. “Based on his two prior convictions for aggravated sexual assault, Mr. Winton qualifies under Texas law as a sexually violent offender.

“The DA’s office wants to insure that persons with this classification are appropriately monitored if they are paroled to our community,” Drake said. “We want to be diligent in prosecuting them for violations of the sex offender registration rules.”

Defense attorney Don Haslam said the jury understood his client did not intentionally fail to register as a sex offender.

Once released from prison in September 2014, Winton reported to his parole officer as required and applied for and received a driver's license, Haslam said.

"He forgot to take the paper with him to the driver's license office showing he was a sex offender," Haslam said. "He was doing everything else he was supposed to do but he just forgot. I think the jury understood that Joe Winton did not kick the law; he stumbled over it."

Winton remains in Lamar County jail on a parole violation warrant as a result of the criminal charges brought by the county, even though a \$150,000 bond has been dismissed.

Haslam said the next step for his client will be a parole hearing before the Texas Department of Criminal Justice.

Mary Madewell

Staff Writer